

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

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AMEMBASSY ROME

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

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SUBJECT: FUNERAL SERVICES FOR METROPOLITAN NIKODIM

1. SUMMARY. THE FUNERAL OF METROPOLITAN NIKODIM, SECOND RANKING MEMBER OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX HIERARCHY, TOOK PLACE IN LENINGRAD ON SEPTEMBER 12. DESPITE ABSENCE OF ANY REFERENCE TO FUNERAL IN SOVIET PRESS, CROWD OF SEVERAL THOUSAND ATTENDED, AS DID THE PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW, A MAJORITY OF BISHOPS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, AND NUMEROUS REPRESENTATIVES OF FOREIGN RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS. CATHOLIC CARDINAL OF UTRECHT, WILLEBRANDS, WHO IS PRESIDENT OF THE VATICAN COUNCIL FOR UNIFICATION OF CHRISTIANS, DELIVERED A EULOGY IN WHICH HE STRESSED THE INTEREST OF THE NEW POPE IN CLOSER RELATIONS WITH ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND HIS HOPE TO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCH. END SUMMARY.

2. IN AN AWESOME DISPLAY OF PAGEANTRY, A SEVEN HOUR FUNERAL SERVICE WAS HELD FOR METROPOLITAN NIKODIM IN THE HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL OF LENINGRAD'S ALEXANDER NEVSKY

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MONASTERY ON SEPTEMBER 12. NIKODIM WAS THE METROPOLITAN OF LENINGRAD AND NOVGOROD, AND A MEMBER OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE. HE DIED SEPTEMBER 5 IN ROME AT THE CONCLUSION OF AN AUDIENCE WITH POPE JOHN PAUL I. ABOUT FIFTY-FIVE OF THE SEVENTY-EIGHT BISHOPS, ARCHBISHOPS AND METROPOLITANS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH PARTICIPATED IN THE SERVICES. AS TESTIMONY TO

NIKODIM'S LONG RECORD OF INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL AND ECUMENICAL RELATIONS, AS WELL AS TO CONTINUING FOREIGN SUPPORT FOR THE RUSSIAN CHURCH, REPRESENTATIVES OF MANY RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS FROM ABROAD ATTENDED, INCLUDING CARDINAL WILLEBRANDS REPRESENTING THE VATICAN, THE CATHOLIC BISHOP OF WARSAW, THE HEADS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN SWEDEN AND FINLAND, THE ORTHODOX METROPOLITAN OF HELSINKI, AND CLERICAL LEADERS FROM HUNGARY.

3. THE MOST ACTIVE ORTHODOX PARTICIPANT IN THE SERVICES WAS METROPOLITAN YUVENALIY, PRESENTLY CHAIRMAN OF THE DIVISION OF FOREIGN CHURCH RELATIONS IN THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE, A JOB ONCE HELD BY NIKODIM. YUVENALIY, DESCRIBED BY ONE KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVER AS A CLOSE FRIEND AND PROTEGE OF NIKODIM, AND A BISHOP WITH A STRONG RECORD OF COOPERATION WITH SOVIET AUTHORITIES, DELIVERED A LENGTHY EULOGY WHICH DESCRIBED NIKODIM'S COMMITMENT TO PEACE AND HUMAN PROGRESS IN TERMS QUITE SIMILAR TO THOSE USED IN SOVIET PROPAGANDA. HE DESCRIBED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE CHURCH AS NOT JUST FORMAL, BUT WARM. THE OTHER PRINCIPAL ORTHODOX EULOGIST WAS BISHOP KIRILL, DIRECTOR OF THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN LENINGRAD AND NIKODIM'S SENIOR ASSISTANT HERE. HIS STATEMENT WAS DEVOTED ALMOST ENTIRELY TO NIKODIM'S SPIRITUAL QUALITIES AND TO HIS DEDICATION TO THE FUTURE OF THE

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CHURCH. HE DID NOTE NIKODIM'S STRONG COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONAL CHURCH RELATIONS, REFLECTED IN THE FACT THAT HIS DEATH WAS REPORTED IN NEWSPAPERS ALL OVER THE WORLD. IF HE INTENDED THIS AS AN IRONIC REFERENCE TO THE ABSENCE OF ANY MENTION OF NIKODIM'S DEATH OR FUNERAL IN THE LENINGRAD PRESS, HIS VOICE GAVE NO HINT OF IT. (NIKODIM'S DEATH WAS REPORTED IN THE MOSCOW SOVIET PRESS, BUT THERE WAS NO NOTICE, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, OF HIS FUNERAL.) THE PARTIARCH ALSO DELIVERED A BRIEF EULOGY WHICH THE REPORTING OFFICER COULD NOT HEAR. DESPITE THE ABSENCE OF INFORMATION IN THE MEDIA CONCERNING THE FUNERAL SERVICES, THE CATHEDRAL WAS FILLED AND A NEARLY EQUAL NUMBER OF MOURNERS STOOD OUTSIDE. NO EFFORT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MADE BY THE AUTHORITIES TO INHIBIT BELIEVERS FROM ENTERING THE MONASTERY OR, WHERE CIRCUMSTANCES PERMITTED, THE CATHEDRAL, A CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH SOME OBSERVERS ATTRIBUTED TO THE STRONG INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AT THE CEREMONIES.

4. THE MOST DRAMATIC MOMENT OF THE SERVICE CAME WHEN CARDINAL WILLEBRANDS, PRESIDENT OF THE VATICAN COUNCIL FOR THE UNIFICATION OF CHRISTIANS, PRONOUNCED A EULOGY.

WILLEBRANDS HAD BEEN WITH THE METROPOLITAN WHEN HE DIED, JUST AFTER HAVING BEEN STRICKEN AT THE END OF AN AUDIENCE WITH POPE JOHN PAUL I AT WHICH WILLEBRANDS WAS THE ONLY OTHER PARTICIPANT. WILLEBRANDS ACCOMPANIED HIS BODY BACK TO THE SOVIET UNION. ADDRESSING THE PATRIARCH, WHO

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WAS SEATED ON A RAISED Dais FLANKED BY HIS BISHOPS AND METROPOLITANS, THE CARDINAL RECOUNTED THE LAST HOURS OF NIKODIM'S LIFE. HE SAID THAT FOLLOWING THE INVESTITURE OF POPE JOHN PAUL I, THE METROPOLITAN WAS THE FIRST OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF NON-CATHOLIC CHURCHES TO BE RECEIVED IN PRIVATE AUDIENCE BY THE POPE, AN AUDIENCE THE METROPOLITAN UNDERTOOK DESPITE HIS SERIOUS PHYSICAL CONDITION, FOR WHICH HE WAS RECEIVING HEAVY MEDICATION. WILLEBRANDS DESCRIBED THE CONVERSATION WHICH ENSUED, THE CENTRAL THEME OF WHICH WAS THE NEED FOR CLOSER TIES BETWEEN CATHOLIC AND ORTHODOX CHURCHES, AND RECOUNTED THE EXPRESSION OF A HOPE BY THE POPE THAT HE AND THE PATRIARCH MIGHT MEET.

5. IN ADDITION TO THE ACTING PRINCIPAL OFFICER, THE CONSULAR CORPS WAS REPRESENTED AT THE SERVICES BY THE FRENCH AND FINNISH CONSULS GENERAL. NO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SOVIET CENTRAL OR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WERE IN EVIDENCE.

6. COMMENT. THE ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES OF THE ORTHODOX HIERARCHY FOR THE METROPOLITAN'S FUNERAL PROVIDED

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US WITH AN OPPORTUNITY, WHICH IS FAIRLY RARE IN LENINGRAD,
TO WATCH THE REACTIONS OF RANDOM GROUPS OF CITIZENS TO
THE PRESENCE OF ROBED CHURCHMEN IN PUBLIC PLACES. THEIR
APPEARANCE SEEMED TO AROUSE UNIVERSAL INTEREST. EVEN A
SINGLE PRIEST SEEMED TO MAKE ALL HEADS TURN IN
THE BUSY MOSKOVSKAYA RAILWAY STATION. WHEN THE PATRIARCH
AND HIS ENTOURAGE OF BISHOPS DEBARKED EN MASS FROM THE
MOSCOW-LENINGRAD TRAIN, STAFFS IN HAND, AND PROCEEDED
UP THE QUAY, ALL OTHER ACTIVITY CEASED. HOWEVER,
THE REPORTING OFFICER SAW NO ONE MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS
AND THE PREDOMINANT REACTION SEEMED TO BE ONE OF CURIOSITY.
END COMMENT. CRUMP

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